

The Public's Right To Know—Release of Government Personnel Information

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

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OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, September 27, 1965

Mr. FRASER. Mr. Speaker, in recent months the Post Office Department has been in the news because of its unwillingness to reveal the names of those who were given temporary summer jobs. Although the Postmaster General has now authorized the release of these names, the question remains unanswered: "What is the right of a Government agency to withhold the names of those who work for that agency?" National security requirements justify a restriction on the release of this information by agencies such as the CIA, NSA, and perhaps a few others.

John Macy, Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, has called attention to the commission guidelines on release of personnel information. These guidelines state a policy that strikes a reasonable balance between the public's right to know and protection of employees from commercial exploitation.

Mr. Speaker, in my 12 years of public service I have always supported those policies which affirm the public's right to know. I believe that Government is the business of the people, and that Government carries a very heavy burden of proof if it seeks to justify a denial of information to the public.

Encroachments on the right to know about Government are inherently dangerous. Government exists to promote the welfare of the people. The power of government is awesome. Government can go astray—and sometimes does. One of the most important checks on possible abuse of that power is the right of the people to have access to information about what it does and how.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I was gratified to read the recent statements by the chairman of the Civil Service Commission. His suggestion that the guidelines permitting the release of basic information as to who works for the Federal Government become mandatory upon all agencies is a wise one. I strongly support such action. He has my unqualified support for putting into effect such a policy.

By unanimous consent Mr. Macy's views as reported in the Minneapolis Tribune for September 26, 1965, and excerpts from the Commission guidelines are inserted at this point in the Record:

CIVIL SERVICE BOSS ORDERS STUDY OF U.S. SECRETARY RULES
(By Nick Kotz)

WASHINGTON, D.C.—John W. Macy Jr., Civil Service Commission Chairman, disagrees with Post Office Department secrecy regulation concerning its employees and has ordered a study of information policies in all Government agencies.

Macy said in an interview that his Commission is studying whether there is need for a Government-wide policy on making basic information about Federal employees available when in the public interest.

Aside from matters affecting national security, the Chairman said he personally believes the public is entitled to know the names, salaries, job titles, and addresses of Federal employees.

Macy said the Commission study was triggered by the controversy in which Postmaster General John Gronouski refused to give Congressmen or news media the names of youths hired under the President's Youth Opportunity summer hiring campaign.

The names were requested after the Minneapolis Tribune disclosed that at least 3,380 postal jobs were distributed as congressional patronage, including some to Congressmen's sons. The President and Civil Service Commission had ordered that the jobs go to needy youths selected through the employment service.

After considerable criticism, the Postmaster General now has made the names available through local postmasters, but he still upholds the Department regulation prohibiting disclosure of names of postal employees.

Macy emphasized he has not studied the reasons for the postal secrecy regulation and does not want to criticize it without learning on what grounds it is being justified.

But in his personal view, Macy said the postal regulation—at face value—is not in accord with Civil Service information guidelines in which he believes.

These guidelines generally require that in nonsecurity matters—news media and Congress are entitled to know who works for the Federal Government. The guidelines discourage release of employee lists to commercial firms or others desiring to use them for commercial or political solicitations.

The Commission guidelines are only advisory and not binding on other agencies. Macy said the purpose of his study is to see whether these guidelines are adequate today, and whether they should be made uniformly mandatory for all Government agencies.

In his role as the President's personnel adviser, Macy could order a uniform employee information policy for all Government departments.

"I start off with the view that basic facts about public employees are public business," said Macy. "The public is entitled to know the names, salaries, job titles and addresses of its Federal employees. Such information should be given out on requests of legitimate public interest."

Macy said he can see no reasons why supplying such basic information would not be in the public interest.

In disagreement with a Post Office Department position, Macy does not believe that release of names, salaries, and addresses would constitute an invasion of employees' personal privacy.

"The privacy of employees should be protected," said Macy, "but I think we also need to consider the public because the public is paying the bill."

Macy said the lists of employees should not be furnished to commercial firms or organizations for commercial or political solicitations.

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER 23 CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION PERSONNEL MANUAL

GENERAL STATEMENT

The Commission recognizes that the citizens of our Nation should have available to them accurate information about the Commission's functions, objectives, programs, and activities. Therefore, it is the policy of the Commission to bring to the

attention of the public, information about the Commission and its work which is of public interest. It is also the Commission's policy to give clear, complete, accurate, and prompt replies to inquiries about it and its work.

All Commission employees have a responsibility to assist in the task of keeping the public informed. Because of their official connection with the Commission they can expect to be considered as sources of information about the Commission and its work by other members of the public. This places them in a good position, both on and off the job, to help the public understand better the purposes, functions, and activities of the Commission.

It is very important, of course, that the information which is conveyed to the public be accurate and reliable. It is also important that information and materials developed and used by the Commission in the conduct of its business not be used by its employees or others for personal gain or other improper purposes. It is important to the security of our Nation that classified defense information be protected from misuse and unauthorized disclosure. To insure that these purposes are accomplished, Commission employees are required to follow certain guides and instructions which pertain to the use, discussion, and disclosure of information about the Commission's work.

RELEASE OF PERSONNEL INFORMATION

All inquiries from outside the Commission should be referred to the Personnel Division in the Central Office or to the official responsible for personnel activities in a regional office. The following guidelines, subject to any applicable restrictions set forth in chapter E7.03 of the Organization and Policy Manual, will be observed in releasing information.

CREDIT INQUIRY

With the following restrictions, personnel information may be furnished upon request to reputable business firms and credit organizations. If the employee has not applied to the organization for credit, verification only will be made of all information other than the title of the employee's position and the date he began working for the Commission. If the employee has made application for credit with the organization, other information such as salary, home address, and date of birth may also be furnished when requested. If there is any doubt as to whether the employee has applied for credit or as to the identity or credibility of the inquirer, a call back must be made and, if feasible, the employee contacted for confirmation.

DEBT COLLECTION

If the employee has left the Commission, the creditor will be given this information in the personnel office. No other information will be given, other than name of agency to which he transferred (if requested) and verification of the employee's address on file if the creditor presents that address. No information other than verification of employment will be given to persons attempting to collect debts from present employees.

The employee contacted will explain the Commission's policy regarding employee indebtedness and suggest that the creditor put his complaint in writing.

POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

When the potential employer is another Government agency, complete information requested may be furnished. When a private employer telephones, verification only will be made of all information except the title of the employee's position and the date he began working for the Commission.

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